

Transitions

A Handbook on Surviving Corporate Change



A TRANSITIONAL PERIOD

You have experienced a transitional event that can initially feel very traumatic. People are usually not well prepared for the changes these kinds of losses make in our everyday lives. This can also create a great deal of personal stress for you and your family members, especially if you are unaware of the common signs and symptoms related to a stressful event.

The signs and symptoms of a stress reaction may last a few days, a few weeks, a few months or, occasionally, longer, depending on the person's history and coping skills. With understanding and the support of loved ones, the stress reactions usually pass more quickly. Sometimes it is beneficial to seek professional assistance to help identify needs and develop an action plan. This does not imply craziness or weakness. It simply indicates a willingness to develop new skills to manage these changes and move one through the transitional stages.

You will likely go through a grieving or mourning process. Some people may also struggle with strong feelings such as fear, worry, anger, regret, guilt and shame. Price Pritchett, Ph.D., identified three (3) stages in this emotional cycle, or mourning process, which you may experience. You will find this information, along with other relevant topics, on the following pages. We hope you will find it to be informative, as well as a helpful resource for you and your family during this transitional period.

Should you or any household member need any further information or assistance, please do not hesitate to contact the Employee Assistance Program at 1-866-252-4468 to schedule an appointment.

TRANSITIONAL STAGES

Price Pritchett, Ph.D., identifies three (3) stages in the emotional cycle of the mourning process¹. These stages are as follows:

1. Shock and Numbness

During this stage, people experience a stunned feeling, a sense of disbelief, and are sometimes immobilized.

They may go back and forth from feeling numb to feelings of panic.

The first reaction may be "I can't believe it" or "You're kidding."

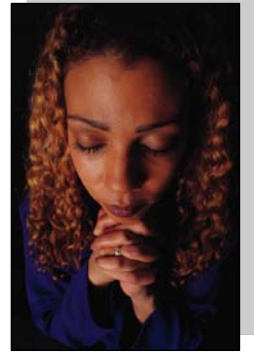
¹ References:

The Employee Survival Guide to Mergers and Acquisitions, Price Pritchett, Ph.D.
Horizon Health EAP - Behavioral Services Critical Incident Stress Information Sheet,
Critical Incident Stress Foundation, 1995

Usually at this stage, there is not much emotional pain, because they are too numb. However, they may experience some feelings of anger. Anger is one way that people express their disbelief, frustration and feelings of helplessness. This is when some people lash out at almost any target that is available, which generally creates more problems.

2. Suffering

This stage is when you come out of the numb stage and begin to actually feel the emotional pain. Now the full impact of what has happened begins to strike home. These emotions, plus the actual changes people fear this loss will bring about, are disorganizing and disturbing. Your feelings become more pronounced and more visible, and you may be more preoccupied with the specifics of what has happened. Frequently, people want to go over the same issues many times with friends and coworkers. There is a need to restate your feelings repeatedly, in an attempt to gain understanding. This is part of the healing process.



The feelings expressed at this point in time are often powerful, such as self-pity, bitterness, frustration, worry and possibly even guilt. Very often, this emotional display scares or annoys others and they may minimize or attack such behaviors. Your support system needs to realize that this is the way grief affects most people. Also, since it can be therapeutic for people to ventilate their feelings and work through them, your support system should not try to stifle these behaviors. Some people are simply suffering and having some difficulty coping and managing their behaviors in response to this change.

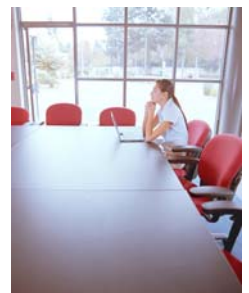
Some people act out their resentments, anger and frustrations very temperamentally and others bottle up their feelings. They can become moody, depressed, unresponsive, withdrawn and apathetic. They will act powerless and show a lack of confidence.

An atmosphere of negativism and pessimism develops and you may hear people saying, “What’s the use?” or “Why me?” In a sense, they sort of give up and do not see their options. Either of these reactions, acted out to the extreme, can create more problems and a delay in moving on.

This stage is when people feel a sense of helplessness. They may see themselves as victims, with anger and depression as common emotional reactions.

What Can You Do?

The best way to cope with these feelings is to express them out loud, rather than keeping them bottled up. It is better to get your feelings out into the open where you can deal with them. When we try to suppress anger, it generally smolders inside and poisons our attitude. This does not mean we should yell or take any inappropriate action towards anyone. Ideally, you will be able to talk openly with your support system (i.e. husband, wife or close friend) and they will encourage you to ventilate your feelings and help you sort out your feelings and develop an appropriate action plan.



Another important aspect of this stage is described as fearfulness or an unwillingness to take risks. This often presents as difficulty in making decisions or staying action-oriented. Also, people frequently become overly preoccupied with the past (i.e. “how sweet it was”) or, possibly, even with the future (i.e. “how awful it’s going to be”). Perhaps this happens because people do not want to come to grips with the aggravation of investing in new relationships and learning a new job. Also, you will very likely find yourself “idealizing” the way things used to be (i.e. “Remember the good old days...”). It is very important that you make yourself remember and balance your perspective on what was positive and what was aggravating or frustrating. Remain objective. Remember that, when people are grieving, they do not like to accept change. There is an unwillingness to move beyond their habitual behavior. They want to protect the status quo. The old way is perceived as familiar, friendly and easier than what is ahead.

3. Resolution

This stage is when people begin to get well. They come to grips with the situation. You know you are moving into Stage 3 when you begin to adjust to the changes... “to get over it.” You are able to look at the situation in a more objective and balanced manner. There is a sense of hopefulness about the future.

You begin to reconcile to the changes with one’s mood, indicating acceptance and commitment to future goals.

People also become more action-oriented, more decisive and more purposeful. They begin to take meaningful steps toward getting on with their lives. Ideally, a sense of enthusiasm and optimism will develop as part of Stage 3. Some people move through Stage 3 quicker than others, while others experience emotional aftershocks or setbacks.

It is important not to isolate, but to continue to work with your support system in developing and implementing an action plan.

Remember, it is important to keep things in perspective. Remember, any negative feelings you may have simply comes from the sense of loss that is part of the change cycle. You will experience some anxiety as you move through this cycle and seriously begin to implement your future goals. However, this can be done with a positive attitude, enthusiasm and optimism. This stage is a normal emotional cycle and it can help you understand yourself and others’ behaviors.

IMPACTS OF CHANGE

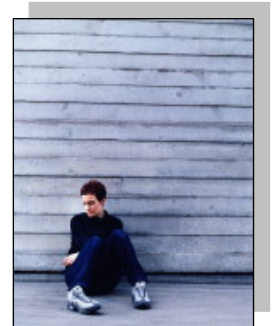
Sometimes our reaction to change can manifest in the following ways:

Physiological	Psychological
Insomnia	Depression
Sleep Difficulties	Anxiety
High Blood Pressure	Preoccupation
Headache	Concentration Problems
Muscle Pain	Loss of Self-confidence
Appetite/Weight Change	Fear of the Unknown
Gastrointestinal Problems	Phobias
Skin Rashes, Irritations	Irritability
Fatigue	Indecision
Alcohol/Drug Use	Short-tempered
	Marital/Family Conflicts

It is important to remember that reactions to changes are normal. It is how we deal with the reactions that is important. There are four different ways people may respond to change.

1. *Disengage*

These individuals may keep a low profile and may withdraw from others to shield or protect themselves. The positive aspect of this response is that it gives people time to reflect and evaluate plans, goals or directions for the future. They simply need time to adjust to the transition.



2. *Disidentification*

Often, these individuals will reflect on the past and become attached to how things were done before. The positive aspect of this response is that it allows the person to contrast what is of value in the past and present. It is important to remember that change generally does not mean that all past experiences are abandoned.

3. *Disorientation*

People may experience feeling lost or unsure of where they will fit in. Their energy may feel scattered into many directions. The positive element in this response is that people will often ask more questions. Questions can clarify reality and relieve uncertainty.

4. Disenchantment

People may feel frustrated, angry or disappointed in how they view the company. The positive aspect of this response is that it brings feelings out in the open and allows employees to begin channeling them toward identifying problems and solutions.

It is important to remember that change represents a transition that is experienced as a sense of loss. This means people will experience grieving and will feel sadness, anger and/or depression.

It is important to allow yourself to:

- Identify what you are feeling.
- Talk about it: share your feelings with family and friends.
- Keep busy with constructive activity: exercise, hobbies, writing and relationships.
- Take care of yourself: eat well, reward yourself.



In summary, try to center on things you do have control over. Many organizational changes happen to us so it is important to remember that transition is temporary. You may not be able to stop the changes from occurring, but you can choose how you want to handle them and manage them effectively.

SELF-CARE IN TIMES OF CHANGE

1. Sort out your reactions.
2. Move forward by developing an action plan.
3. Reduce stress.
4. Keep good health habits.
5. Use your support system.
6. Use your Employee Assistance Program.

WAYS FAMILY MEMBERS AND FRIENDS CAN HELP

- Listen carefully.
- Schedule time together.
- Offer your assistance and a listening ear, if they have not asked for help.
- Reassure them.
- Help them with everyday tasks.
- Give them some private time.
- Don't take their anger or other feelings personally.
- Don't tell them that they are "lucky it wasn't worse." Those statements do not console. Instead, tell them that you are sorry such an event has occurred and that you want to understand and assist them in establishing future goals.



JOB TRANSITION COPING TECHNIQUES

1. Accept the grieving process

It takes time to accept and adjust to your situation. It is important to accept the feelings that accompany job loss or organizational change. People will experience five states of loss, which include:

- Denial
- Bargaining
- Depression
- Anger
- Acceptance

2. Have hope in the future.

- Focus on your strengths.

3. Your family and close friends are the best support.

- Seek support from good listeners.

4. Find a support network of others who have experienced similar situations.

- Prevent isolation by developing constructive activities or hobbies.

5. If you plan to look for new employment, have patience and be persistent.

- Keep an inventory of your skills, and write them down.

6. Take care of yourself, exercise regularly and eat well.

DEVELOP A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

How you may perceive a situation determines how you will experience it. It's easy to fall into negative ways of seeing difficult experiences. Seeing crisis as opportunities will expand your options. A positive attitude means more than just doing positive things. It also means balancing work, personal life, family, health, and time off for your self. Try these skills for developing a positive attitude.



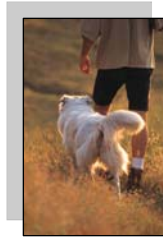
Laugh. Humor is one of the best stress-relievers going. Take the time to find the humor in your situation. Humor and worry don't mix. Research shows that laughing actually makes people healthier.

Reach Out. When you're feeling low, you may be tempted to keep well-wishers at arms length. Asking for love, encouragement, honest and caring feedback, or just an understanding ear can help you get back on course. Reach out to those who care about you and who can help you with things as positively as possible.

A Change of Scenery. Sometimes, “getting away from it all” is exactly the thing to do. It’s hard to take your problems so seriously when you change your perspective. Change your routine – if you work indoors, take a walk in the woods; if you work outdoors, do something indoors, like going to a museum or a movie.

Live The Wellness Way. Taking good care of your health will help you handle stressors more successfully. Get exercise and enough rest, eat a balanced healthy diet, and you’ll be ready for change.

Love A Pet. An animal’s generous, unconditional love and unworried, unhurried pace can restore your calm and your sanity. Just taking a moment out to sit with your pet can remind you how good life is.



Have A Good Talk With Yourself. We talk to ourselves all of the time – usually critically. Negative self-talk just makes you feel worse. Instead of saying, “You sure blew that one,” try talking to yourself positively: “You learned that new step very well.” Notice all the little things you do right. Make lists of your positive accomplishments and post them in visible places.



Relax and Let It Go. Successful coping depends on being able to relax and let everything go from time to time. The body needs to renew itself and recharge. You might try meditation, visualization, yoga, hot baths, listening to music, or simply sleep.

Some Don’ts. Some activities do not reduce stress in the long run. In fact, they make things worse: *Don’t abuse drugs, alcohol, or even coffee, cigarettes, or food: they can drain your energy. Don’t spend money on things you can’t afford – that will drain your finances. Don’t rely on sympathy – use positive coping skills, which will pay you back in vitality and results.*

EFFECTIVE GOAL SETTING ELEMENTS

- Must be realistic and achievable.
- Write them down.
- Use a present tense verb.
- Be positive.
- Focus on the end result.
- Make goals measurable and specific.
- Be realistic with your timeframes.
- Be flexible with your timeframes.
- Need to be compatible with your lifestyle.

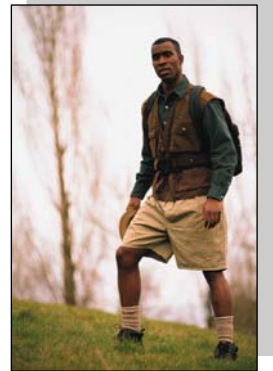


THE THREE R'S OF CHANGE: RECOVER, REFOCUS, REGENERATE

Major work and life changes are common: promotions, relocations, divorce, parenthood and numerous other events. Whether these changes are welcome or unwelcome, all can be extremely stressful unless we learn how to adjust to them. Taking the time to recover, refocus and regenerate following life changes can help us survive and even thrive.

Recover

After a life change, you need to regain your sense of balance and routine. Your situation may be, at least for now, stressful, challenging and unfamiliar. You may have symptoms such as headaches, backaches or depression. To begin your recovery, it will help to step back from your new situation. Plan a weekend getaway, or take time just for yourself. Mini-breaks, like going to the movies, can help you get distance and perspective. Exercise and sharing your feelings with others are excellent stress reducers that can help you get back on track.



Refocus



If you are able to look at “the big picture,” you’ll gain greater peace of mind about the change. Take time to think about what has happened, why and what it might mean. You might realize that your feelings are mixed. For example, if you’ve been promoted, you might be pleased with the higher salary, but uncomfortable about supervising your friends. You may feel sad or angry about having to let go of familiar people and routines. With time, those feelings will change. Talking to trusted friends, family members, a counselor, or human resource professional may speed the process.

Regenerate

All change is stressful for your body and your body needs time to heal. Get extra rest, avoid alcohol and cigarettes, and eat properly. Try to increase your circle of support – connect with new people or reinforce old friendships.

No one can escape change. Accepting the fact that change has taken place is important. When you take steps to recover, refocus and regenerate, you will find acceptance easier. These steps will help you successfully make the change part of your life.



THE SELF-MANAGEMENT PROCESS

Adapted from *Aftershock: Helping People Through Corporate Change*. Harry Woodward and Steve Buchholz, New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1987.

Think of a change situation you are currently experiencing. Rate your feelings during this change using the scales below. For example, if you felt that the change was more of a Threat than an Opportunity, you would circle either 1 or 2 on the scale below. Please circle only one response for each pair of words.

1.	Threat	0	1	2	3	4	5	Opportunity
2.	Holding On to The Past	0	1	2	3	4	5	Living In The Present
3.	Immobilized	0	1	2	3	4	5	Activated
4.	Rigid	0	1	2	3	4	5	Flexible
5.	A Loss	0	1	2	3	4	5	A Gain
6.	Victim of Change	0	1	2	3	4	5	Agent of Change
7.	Reactive	0	1	2	3	4	5	Proactive, Responsive
8.	Focused On The Past	0	1	2	3	4	5	Focused On The Future
9.	Separate from Change	0	1	2	3	4	5	Involved with Change
10.	Confused	0	1	2	3	4	5	Clear

1. What am I telling myself about the change? What do I fear losing?
2. Is it really true? Is everything I've been saying about what I've lost really true?
3. What do I really want from this change? What would I like to gain?
4. What first step can I take to gain what I want?

OPT FOR OPTIMISM: HOW POSITIVE ATTITUDES DEFUSE STRESS

Research has shown that most illnesses, including headaches, backaches, and heart disease, can be caused or influenced by our feelings and stress levels. When we experience life changes – positive or negative – our bodies need time to recover. Having an optimistic attitude can help speed recovery and may even keep you healthier than someone with negative attitudes. By learning to “look on the bright side,” you can help counteract the negative effects of stress and improve your overall health.

Looking On The Bright Side

The classic definition of an optimist is a person who sees a glass as half full, while a pessimist sees it as half empty. Optimists choose to feel hopeful about how they see a situation. Optimists are positive thinkers who practice positive “self-talk.” They tell themselves, “I can.” Optimism, or positive thinking, can help accomplish a surprising number of personal and work goals.

Become An Optimist

1. Find a role model. Find someone who seems to make the best of any given situation. Find out how that person maintains that attitude, and copy the behavior. Chances are, even during difficult times, optimism helps your role model get through it with fewer negative effects.
2. Practice positive self-talk. Tell yourself positive things every day for a month (“I can do the job,” “I like myself,” etc.). Practice positive self-talk for at least one month, before judging how it has affected your attitude.
3. Practice affirmations. Affirmations are positive, motivating statements. Use short “I am” statements: “I am happy with my job.” Say the affirmation out loud, several times, then imagine it happening.

Accentuate The Positive

No one is optimistic all of the time. But, anyone can learn how to adopt a more positive, healthier attitude. When you practice being an optimist, you’ll be on your way to a happier, healthier body and mind.

SELF-TALK WORKSHEET: CHANGING FROM NEGATIVE TO POSITIVE

In many situations, the only thing we can control is our own response. Changing self-talk from negative to positive is an excellent way to manage that response and stress.

Naming

We all name our experiences: “Crisis,” “Bad as usual” and “A great challenge” are names you might give to things that happen.

Pick a recent upsetting experience. Describe it in a few words. _____

Is there a positive name you could give it? (learning experience, chance to change, etc.) _____

List the names you gave to 5 recent experiences, good or bad. _____

If they happened to someone else, what other positive names could you give them? _____

Letting Go

You often must let go of dreams, people, or parts of your life. Letting go allows you to get on with your life when something is over.

Write down two things you need to “let go” _____

Imagine that each one is really going out of your life. How do you feel? (sad, angry, relieved, etc.) _____

Who can you tell about your feeling? _____

What advice would you give to someone who is in your situation? _____

Belief and Faith

Self-talk reflects our belief in who we are or in the universe. A positive faith can help you during stressful times.

Name 10 positive things you believe in about yourself, people or the universe. If you can't think of 10 beliefs, ask other people for theirs. _____

Describe a recent experience and how you used one of these beliefs to help you. _____

Silent Support

We all have a constant stream of silent talk in our minds. This can be a great support, or a weight on our shoulders. Close your eyes.

What is your silent talk saying right now? _____

Write three negative messages you often hear. _____

Write their opposites as positive messages. _____

RELAX YOUR STRESS AWAY: GREAT WAYS TO DE-STRESS

Your shoulders are tense, your back hurts. You feel grouchy and know it's all due to stress. What can you do? The relaxation techniques described below can help relieve both the physical and emotional tension that often follows stressful situations.

Relax Your Body

The next time you feel the effects of too much stress, try some of the following ways to help your relax.



1. **Deep breathing.** While sitting, lying down, or standing, close your eyes and breathe in slowly. Let the breath out for a count of 5 – 10 seconds. Take ten of these super-relaxers any time you feel tense.
2. **Stretching.** Practice simple stretches such as the “neck stretch”: stretch your neck by gently rolling your head in a half-circle, starting at one side, then dropping your chin to your chest, then to the other side.
3. **Exercise.** All kinds of physical activity – hiking, running, bowling, walking, etc. – help to reduce stress.
4. **Take a bath.** Ask household members to allow you at least 30 minutes of uninterrupted time.
5. **Get a massage.** A massage is a wonderful way to get rid of physical tension. Professional masseuses generally take 30 minutes to an hour, and will work on specific areas of tension, such as lower back or neck.
6. **Eat well.** Reduce caffeine (in coffee, black tea, chocolate) and alcohol intake. Find out if your diet is well-balanced, and take steps to eat healthy to help reduce stress.

Relax Your Emotions

Talk. Take the time to talk with a friend, spouse or child. Express feelings you might have been holding in. Listen carefully to your partner. Walking in a quiet neighborhood or park can limit distractions.

Laugh. Go to a comedy club, see a funny movie, or spend time with a funny friend.

Cry. Crying can be as good a release as laughing. If you haven't cried in a long time, try listening to sad music, watching a sad movie or writing about a sad experience.

Read. A good book is a great escape. Reading a tear-jerker or comedy can help release pent-up emotions.

Do something you love. When you enjoy yourself, whether it's gardening, going to the beach, or seeing friends, you relax your emotions.

Create Stress Reducers These are just a few stress reducers you can try. You can create your own healthy stress reducers (without alcohol or drugs), or use those listed above. You'll feel better and stay healthier, if you do.

TAKE A DEEP BREATH...AND RELAX

When you're under stress, your muscles tense and your breathing becomes shallow and rapid. One of the simplest (and best) ways to stop the stress response is to breathe deeply and slowly. It sounds simple, and it is. Most of us, however, do not breathe deeply under normal circumstances, so it may help to review the mechanics of deep breathing and how it helps us relax.

Breathing Under Stress

When prehistoric humans were in danger of attack, their muscles tensed and their breathing became rapid and shallow, as they prepared to run or fight. Their high level of tension was a means of preparing their bodies for optimum performance. Today, the causes of our "stress" are different, but our stress response is the same. However, since we're not running or fighting, our tension has no release and our stress response builds. One way to counteract the stress response is to learn how to breathe deeply and slowly --the opposite of how we breathe when under stress.

How Deep Breathing Works



Deep breathing is not always natural to adults. Watch the way a baby breathes: the area beneath the chest goes in and out. Most adults breathe from the chest. This is shallower breathing, so less oxygen is taken in with each breath. As a result, blood is forced to move through the system quickly so that enough oxygen gets to the brain and organs. Higher blood pressure results.

Deep breathing can reverse these effects. Take some time to practice this kind of breathing each day, especially when you're under stress.

You can be sitting, standing, or lying down, but it helps to wear loose, comfortable clothing. Begin by breathing in through your nostrils. Count to five, silently saying the word "in," and let your lower abdomen fill with air. Then, count to five, silently saying the word "out," as you let the air escape through pursed lips. Do this deep breathing for two minutes or more each time. With practice, you will be able to count slowly to ten or higher. You can increase your relaxation, if you imagine breathing in ocean air, the scent of flowers or forest air.

Effects of Deep Breathing

By helping you let go of tension, deep breathing can relieve headaches, backaches, stomach aches, and sleeplessness. It releases the body's own painkillers, called endorphins, into the system. It allows blood pressure to return to normal, which is good for your heart. Deep breathing can also allow held-in emotions to come to the surface, so your emotional health benefits from deep breathing, too. Use deep breathing any time, anywhere. It is one of the best techniques for relieving stress.